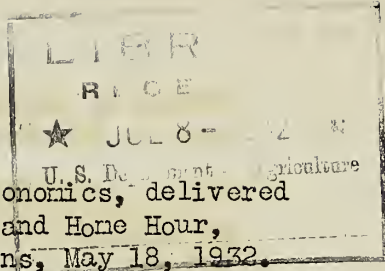


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PRESENT TRENDS IN COTTON



A radio talk, by Ruth O'Brien, Bureau of Home Economics, delivered in the Land Grant College program of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC radio stations, May 18, 1932.

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Much of the textile literature coming to my desk recently has told me that this is National Cotton Week. And when I walk through the department stores with the rest of the crowd of women shoppers, I see plenty of signs repeating that information. All of this has started me to thinking of just what our attitude as consumers should be to all these special weeks we hear so much about these days.

I think they are valuable to us in that they focus attention on the advances in these various fields of production and manufacture. I would have us take this week as an opportunity to learn something about the importance of this fiber in our national economy--what it means to thousands of workers in the fields of the south and in the mills of our north-eastern and southern states. And I would have us notice and appreciate the many varied uses to which it is being put these days.

We find it in the automobile industry, in aeroplanes, down under ground, in mines, as brattice cloths. It is used in road construction and in a thousand other commercial ways of which most of us never hear. For the home, new wall coverings with cotton as a foundation material are now on the market. Cotton rugs are becoming very common and are providing attractive, inexpensive floor coverings. Durable cotton upholstery is winning the approval of many homemakers.

But it is as clothing that most of us meet cotton. And here especially we have had some ingenious and valuable new uses developed during the past few months. Beautiful new and interesting fabrics, cotton stockings, gloves, and even cotton shoes and a water-proofed cotton for raincoats and umbrellas recently came to my attention. The trend is undoubtedly toward the invention of more extended and I believe more intelligent uses of cotton.

All of these new developments are very interesting, but as consumers we should consider something more than this. Before we buy a cotton or any kind of fabric we want to be sure we are getting the qualities we need for the particular purpose we have in mind. Novelties have their place in adding to the fun of living. But the majority of our textile purchases must be more fundamental in their character. The same principles hold true no matter what fiber is used.

First of all, the fiber itself should be the one best suited to the purpose. Then the fabric into which it is woven should be of firm, well balanced construction, with no flaws in yarn or weave. And if it is cotton, fast color must be added to the list. The most outstanding characteristic of cotton is its washability. It is therefore hard for me to understand why it is sometimes made into fabrics of such construction that they are

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ruined by washing; or why cotton fabrics are combined with trimmings or used in garment designs which cannot be washed.

The cotton stocking we used to know was not a thing of beauty, but it emphasized another outstanding quality of cotton--durability. Some of the new cotton stockings are just as durable, and what is more they are good-looking and resist snagging--that trial of all women. But others are flimsy and lack the re-enforcement at heel and toe which adds to the life of any stocking.

It all comes back to the same thing--that old-fashioned thing called quality. One of a number of unpleasant experiences through which we are passing at the present time is the danger of a decided drop in the quality of our merchandise. In an attempt to stimulate purchasing, prices are in some cases being lowered to a point at which quality simply cannot be maintained. As consumers, we may well keep in mind that one article of good substantial workmanship and material is better than a dozen poor ones for the same money.

Cotton is a very versatile fiber. It is durable, it is inexpensive and it launders well. When chosen with even a moderate degree of care, it returns full measure of satisfaction.

The other night at the circus--yes, I went to the circus but of course it was only because of a certain six-year old wanted to go--well, she and I were gazing spell bound at a performer doing a miraculous balancing stunt way up near the top of the big tent, many, many feet above our heads. Suddenly just like all women, her interest in clothes came to the surface even in the tenseness of a big moment like that. She leaned over to me and in all seriousness inquired, "What is his suit made of-- cotton, wool or silk?" I was a little nonplussed. What fiber is preferred by aerial artists? I'm sure I don't know, but since it was National Cotton Week, I suggested cotton. I think it is adaptable enough for even such heights as that.